



# Ex-Service Organisations Round Table March 2025

## **Ex-Service Organisations Round Table Meeting**

The Ex-Service Organisations Round Table (ESORT) met on Tuesday, 25 March 2025.

### **DVA update – Secretary [Alison Frame, DVA]**

The Secretary provided an update, including indicating a Federal Budget update later in the evening. She briefed ESORT members on further improvements DVA is achieving in regard to the time taken to process claims, DVA staffing levels and the work underway to create an Institute of Veterans' Advocates to establish and maintain higher professional standards and best practice. Secretary Frame also updated members on DVA's continued focus on business and process improvements, the need for investment in DVA's ICT systems, the recent passing by the Australian Parliament of legislation to simplify and harmonise the veterans' legislation framework, and arrangements for this year's overseas Anzac Day commemorations.

## **ESORT Member Submissions**

### **Australia's Involvement in the Vietnam War (Air Force Association)**

DVA formally recognises the dates of Australian involvement in the Vietnam War as spanning from 2 July 1962 to 29 April 1975. Australian involvement commenced in July 1962 and expanded to include all armed services.

While Australia formally announced the end of its active involvement in the war in Vietnam on 11 January 1973, in 1975 the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) provided crucial humanitarian assistance in the war's final days. The

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Nominal Roll of Vietnam Veterans also reflects service occurring between 2 July 1962 and 29 April 1975.

The National Vietnam memorial on Anzac Parade is managed by the National Capital Authority (NCA). DVA undertook to write to the NCA in support of the submission to add 1975 to the Memorial, and noting the unanimous support of ESORT.

### **Measuring the success of the Wellbeing Hubs** (Returned and Services League of Australia)

The Department has engaged La Trobe University to design and undertake an evaluation of the Veterans' and Families' Hubs program.

The Hubs deliver integrated support to veterans and families, including wellbeing support, advocacy, employment and housing advice, social connection and physical and mental health services. The service delivery model for each hub varies and the range of services provided at each location is determined based on local veteran community needs.

The evaluation aims to gather a community-centred view of the experience of people who are using hubs, including their expectations, needs, satisfaction levels, concerns and the supports they receive. The evaluation will also seek to understand the views of other stakeholders, including those who are not accessing the hubs and barriers to access.

The evaluation is expected to focus on two of the initial six hubs that were established, the Shoalhaven Veteran and Family Hub in Nowra and the Mates4Mates Veteran & Family Wellbeing Centre in Darwin. Nowra and Darwin were selected due to their difference in demographic, service types, post-service nature and service providers. This will provide a broad cross-section of the community. It is anticipated that the lessons learned from these locations will be valuable across the national hubs network.

The evaluation is expected to be finalised in late 2025. DVA invited ESORT to have a representative on the Evaluation Advisory Group.

## **DVA Critical Initiatives**

**Update on the consultation and co-design process for the establishment of a new agency to focus on veteran wellbeing and an ESO Peak Body**

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On 2 December 2024, the Government released its response to the Final Report of the Royal Commission, agreeing to most of the recommendations. As part of the response, the Government provided \$4.5 million to DVA to undertake consultation on transition and wellbeing supports, including the co-design of a new agency focused on wellbeing within the Department, and separately, to continue to consult on the development of a national peak body (Recommendations 80, 87 and 89). The Department has engaged some external expertise to support it in its consultation and co-design approach. A range of inputs such as submissions and co-design forums will inform proposals to be presented to government for consideration.

### **Claims Lodgement Support Model**

The claims lodgement support model was developed in response to feedback from Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs) that they were experiencing a large increase in referrals for pensions and advocacy services and experiencing difficulty in meeting the demand. Under the model, DVA staff meet with veterans and assist them to lodge their claims. This support has resulted in an easing of workloads for the ESOs involved. To date the model has been delivered to areas of need in response to approaches made to DVA and will continue to be available upon request.

Members were also briefed on the progress on the Institute of Veterans' Advocates and the impact it will have on unscrupulous providers and fee-for-service agents. A motion was passed in the Australian Parliament for referral of matters regarding veteran advocacy to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee for inquiry and report by 5 August 2025.

### **DVA Website Enhancement Project**

The Department is enhancing its website to improve the user experience and navigation, be responsive on all devices and to be more modern and accessible.

### **Business Improvements**

DVA continues to prioritise the health and wellbeing of Australia's veterans through several business improvements.

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DVA's rehabilitation program has increased the availability of social wellbeing initiatives offered with funding of up to \$2,000 available per participant. A new activity flyer promoting social wellbeing activities and how veterans can access these through rehabilitation was published to DVA's website. This will provide not only greater choice for veterans, but greater control over their rehabilitation plans and faster access to services.

Improvements associated with health treatment include the commencement of a six-month trial relating to clinically necessary GP referred MRIs on 7 October 2024. This trial complements other internal improvements for a streamlined assessment process for some low-risk Medical Expenses Privately Incurred (MEPI) applications, delivering faster services to veterans and streamlining administrative requirements.

Changes supporting eligible VEA clients travelling to approved medical treatment under the Booked Car with Driver service include the removal of treatment location criterion and simplification of the specified medical condition criterion for veterans aged 79 years or younger, clarifying and improving access for clients requiring assistance. Enhancements to MyService now enable MRCA clients to include road tolls in their online travel reimbursement claims.

DVA's Business Improvement Team can be contacted on:

[PDD.REFORM.PROJECT@dva.gov.au](mailto:PDD.REFORM.PROJECT@dva.gov.au)

### **Psychiatric Assistance Dog (PAD) Pilot**

Members were provided with an update on the Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program's new initiative – a public access rights card, which is being piloted in 2025. Veterans with an assistance dog are provided with a wallet-sized card containing information about the public access rights of assistance dogs nationally. The card is already assisting the Program's 367 veterans to educate operators in the community, ensuring the assistance dog can go wherever their veteran handler can.

### **Other Business**

The following items were discussed under Other Business:

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- a brief update was received from the Younger Veterans Contemporary Needs Forum.

## **Items below the line**

### **Women Veterans' Strategy**

ESORT Members were provided with an update on the Women Veterans' Strategy that is under development and the consultation process to date. Members raised the need for more women advocates and suggested this could be a component of the strategy.

Papers were provided on the following topics but not discussed in detail:

- Legislative Reform Update
- Advocacy Update and Claims Handling
- Claims Processing Update
- Aged and Community Care Update
- Veteran Hearing Services Framework Update
- Transport – Booked Car with Driver
- Update on Artificial Intelligence
- Joint Transition Authority (JTA) Update



## Significant funding for veterans through MYEFO

The 2025-26 Budget builds on significant investments into the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) via the 2024-25 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) process.

An additional \$1.5 billion in 2024-25 and \$1.8 billion over four years to 2027-28 was provided for compensation payments for veterans following a significant increase in demand for DVA's services after the clearance of the unallocated claims backlog in February 2024, as recommended by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (Royal Commission).

Further to this, the Government also provided DVA with \$34.9 million in additional funding to further increase the support provided to Australia's veterans and their families and to consult with them on critical new initiatives.

This included:

- \$30.4 million in 2024-25 to meet continuing growth in claims demand and complexity and support downstream client services.
- \$4.5 million in 2024-25 for DVA to co-design, in consultation with the veteran community, a new agency focused on veteran wellbeing, as well as to continue consultation on the development of a national ex-service organisation peak body.

Additionally, the Government has provided funding of \$5 million to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet over two years to support the Interim Defence and Veteran Service Commissioner in establishing the Defence and Veteran Service Commission and for a new cross-agency taskforce to provide advice to Government on the implementation of the Government response to the Royal Commission and deliver a coordinated plan for implementation.

### Why is this important?

#### Significant funding for veteran compensation claims

The 2024-25 MYEFO provided an additional \$1.5 billion in 2024-25 and \$1.8 billion over four years to 2027-28 for compensation payments for veterans under the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2024*. This largely reflects an increase in the number of claims lodged and accepted, including as a result of the Government's investments in DVA to clear the claims backlog, which is resulting in increased payments to veterans.

Compensation claims are a fundamental part of Australia's veteran support system and this significant investment will ensure our former service men and women receive the critical health and wellbeing support they deserve.

This is on top of the \$18.6 billion estimated in the 2024-25 Budget to 2027-28.

#### Department of Veterans' Affairs – additional resourcing to support service delivery

\$30.4 million in 2024-25 addresses the additional increased demand for downstream services following an increase in the determination of claims.

This growth has resulted from previous resourcing investments, providing the Department with an additional 640 permanent APS staff (ASL) since 2022, resulting in the determination of the majority of the almost 42,000 claims the Australian Government committed to clearing in response to the Interim Report of the Royal Commission, as well as new claims that have been determined in line with Budget estimates.

This measure also provides for the conversion of 260 Open Arms – Veterans & Family Counselling staff from non-ongoing to ongoing positions, in line with the Government’s broader objectives to reduce outsourcing of core work and reliance on consultants, contractors and labour hire. In addition to these 260, the 2025-26 Budget also sees the Government provide for the conversion of 90 Open Arms staff and 17 Complex Case Management officers from non-ongoing to ongoing APS employees.

These staff are part of DVA’s ongoing service offering and the recognition of these positions as ongoing officers will ensure key service delivery functions will continue uninterrupted to veterans and their families.

### **Co-design and consultation relating to priority work recommended by the Royal Commission**

The Royal Commission’s Final Report has laid out a clear set of recommendations to address Defence personnel and veteran suicide.

Key recommendations from the Royal Commission concern the establishment of a new agency focused on veteran wellbeing within DVA and the development of a national peak body for ex-service organisations.

\$4.5 million has been provided in 2024-25 for DVA to co-design, in consultation with the veteran community, a new agency focussed on veteran wellbeing, as well as to continue consultation on the development of a national ex-service organisation peak body.

Ensuring the new agency and peak body align with the needs of the veteran community and ensuring veterans and their families are involved in the development of these new bodies is critical to ensure they deliver the best possible outcomes for Australia’s veteran community into the future.

### **Who will benefit?**

All Australian veterans and families.

### **Date of effect?**

December 2024 to 2027-28.

### **How much will this cost?**

\$1.5 billion in 2024-25 and \$1.8 billion over four years to 2027-28 for veteran compensation claims.

\$30.4 million in 2024-25 for additional resourcing to DVA to support service delivery.

\$4.5 million in 2024-25 for co-design and consultation on implementing key Royal Commission recommendations.



## Department of Veterans' Affairs – additional resourcing to support service delivery

This measure provides \$47.6 million in 2025–26 to critical service delivery areas in the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) to continue to meet increased demand for services.

DVA is better resourced than it has been in decades, meaning veterans and their families are receiving services and support through the Department faster. This has led to an increase in demand for DVA's services as more compensation claims are determined and more services are delivered.

This measure will allow the Department to meet this increased demand by supporting staff in key areas, including the Veteran Access Network, Veteran Support Officers, complex case management, information access and mental health support.

### Why is this important?

Maintaining DVA's service-delivery workforce will help address increased demand for DVA services and improve the timeliness in which veterans and their families can access support.

Delays in access to services has been identified by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide as a key factor in the health and wellbeing outcomes of veterans.

Following previous resourcing investments, providing an additional 640 permanent APS staff (ASL) since 2022, DVA cleared and largely determined the almost 42,000 unallocated claims backlog as recommended by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. This has led to an increase in demand and more services being delivered to veterans and their families. This additional funding will allow DVA to meet this demand and support the wellbeing of Australia's veteran community.

### Who will benefit?

All veterans and their family members who access DVA services.

### Date of effect?

1 July 2025

### How much will this cost?

\$47.6 million in 2025–26.



## Continuing to support veterans and their families

This measure provides \$11.9 million to support continued access to valuable health and support programs for veterans and families.

This includes:

- Continuing to deliver the **Veteran Employment Program**
- Extension of the **Veterans – volunteer training in suicide recognition and intervention program** to 30 June 2026
- Extension of the **Veterans' Chaplaincy Pilot Program** to 30 June 2026
- Extension of the **Military and Veteran Psychiatry Training Program** to 30 June 2026
- Supporting **Invictus Australia** to 30 June 2026
- Supporting the **Australian Kookaburra Kids Foundation** to 30 June 2026

### Why is this important?

#### **Veteran Employment Program (VEP)**

The VEP promotes positive employment outcomes for veterans and ensure veterans' skills and experiences are understood and valued by the wider community. This funding ensures fundamental elements of the VEP continue in 2025-26 FY. This includes delivery of the 2025 Prime Minister's National Veteran Employment Awards, the Veteran Employment Program website which hosts key resources for employers, veterans and families, and key outreach activities can continue.

#### **Veterans – volunteer training in suicide recognition and intervention**

Prevention of veteran suicide is a key priority for the Australian Government and the veteran community. Ex-service organisations, veterans, families, caregivers and friends play an important role in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of veterans.

Through this initiative, the Department of Veterans' Affairs will continue to deliver a national series of workshops and training sessions on topics such as mental health first aid and suicide awareness. The training aims to increase the capacity of the ex-service community to support veterans in distress.

#### **Veterans' Chaplaincy Pilot Program (VCPP)**

VCPP provides continuity of chaplaincy support after separation from the ADF – particularly for at-risk veterans and families – through the provision of pastoral care, spiritual health, and support for moral injury.

VCPP chaplains also upskill the faith-based community to better provide support for moral injury and other veterans' issues, enhancing the veteran-centric support available in the community.

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### **Military and Veteran Psychiatry Training Program (MVPTP)**

MVPTP increases veteran access to psychiatrists who have specialist training in veteran and military health. Trainee psychiatrists who participate in the Program are trained in veteran and trauma-focused care.

### **Invictus Australia**

The benefits of sport for physical and mental health are widely acknowledged, including during recovery and rehabilitation.

This initiative provides an additional year of grant funding to Invictus Australia to continue to support wounded, injured or ill veterans on their recovery journey through participation in adaptive sports, including the Invictus Games and the Warrior Games

### **Australian Kookaburra Kids Foundation**

Australian and international research shows that children in Defence and veteran families often experience additional challenges compared to their civilian peers, such as moving regularly with postings and having a parent away on deployment for extended periods.

This funding will support the Australian Kookaburra Kids Foundation to continue to deliver mental health support to children aged 8 to 18 years old from Defence and veteran families through the *Defence Kids Program*.

## **Who will benefit?**

### **Veteran Employment Program**

The VEP encourages and supports employers to recruit and retain veterans and build veteran-inclusive work environments. This not only benefits the approximately 6,000 people moving from the Australian Defence Force every year but all veterans in the civilian workplace.


### **Military and Veteran Psychiatry Training Program**

Trainees will gain experience in delivering mental-health services to veterans. These skills enable more veterans to be treated by a workforce trained in the unique mental health challenges associated with military service.

The extension will allow for up to 20 places for trainees to complete their training.

### **Veterans – volunteer training in suicide recognition and intervention**

Veterans, caregivers, family members, and friends of veterans, along with volunteers who work with veterans and their families. Up to 2,000 participants are expected to participate in this training and support the veteran community.



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## **Veterans' Chaplaincy Pilot Program (VCP)**

The VCP is available to all transitioning ADF members, veterans and families in the three pilot locations of Townsville, Perth and Brisbane.

The extension will allow continuing support to be provided to the veteran community in these locations.

## **Invictus Australia**

Wounded, injured or ill veterans across Australia, and the sporting organisations that support them.

## **Australian Kookaburra Kids Foundation**

Children aged 8 to 18 from both current and ex-serving ADF families. These children face challenges such as frequently settling into new locations and schools, the absence of a parent during deployment, and adjusting to their parent's separation from the ADF and the loss of their Defence community support system.

## **Date of effect?**

1 July 2025

## **How much will this cost?**

\$11.9 million, including:

- \$1.0 million to continue key elements of the Veteran Employment Program
- \$1.0 million to extend the Supporting Veterans – volunteer training in suicide recognition and intervention program
- The Budget has provided for extensions to:
  - the Military and Veteran Psychiatry Training Program (costs met from within existing funding), and
  - the Veterans' Chaplaincy Pilot Program (\$1.0 million met from within existing funding)
- \$3.3 million to continue to support Invictus Australia
- \$5.6 million to continue to support the Australian Kookaburra Kids Foundation